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Abraham Lincoln.

Poem.

Summer 1865.



Atlantic Monthly.
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ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

SUMMER, 1865.

DEAD is the roll of the drums,
 And the distant thunders die,
 They fade in the far-off sky;
 And a lovely summer comes,
 Like the smile of Him on high.

Lulled the storm and the onset.
 Earth lies in a sunny swoon;
 Stiller splendor of noon,
 Softer glory of sunset,
 Milder starlight and moon!

For the kindly Seasons love us;
 They smile over trench and clod,
 (Where we left the bravest of us.)—
 There's a brighter green of the sod,
 And a holier calm above us
 In the blesséd Blue of God.

The roar and ravage were vain;
 And Nature, that never yields,
 Is busy with sun and rain
 At her old sweet work again
 On the lonely battle-fields.

How the tall white daisies grow
 Where the grim artillery rolled!
 (Was it only a moon ago?
 It seems a century old.)—

And the bee hums in the clover,
 As the pleasant June comes on;
 Aye, the wars are all over,—
 But our good Father is gone.

There was tumbling of traitor fort,
 Flaming of traitor fleet,—
 Lighting of city and port,
 Claspings in square and street.

There was thunder of mine and gun,
 Cheering by mast and tent,—
 When—his dread work all done,
 And his high fame full won—
 Died the Good President.

In his quiet chair he sate,
 Pure of malice or guile,
 Stainless of fear or hate,—
 And there played a pleasant smile

On the rough and careworn face ;
 For his heart was all the while
 On means of mercy and grace.

The brave old Flag drooped o'er him,
 (A fold in the hard hand lay,)—
 He looked, perchance, on the play.—
 But the scene was a shadow before him,
 For his thoughts were far away.

'T was but the morn, (yon fearful
 Death-shade, gloomy and vast,
 Lifting slowly at last,)
 His household heard him say,
 "'T is long since I've been so cheerful,
 So light of heart as to-day."

'T was dying, the long dread clang,—
 But, or ever the blessed ray
 Of peace could brighten to-day,
 Murder stood by the way,—
 Treason struck home his fang!
 One throb—and, without a pang,
 That pure soul passed away.

Idle, in this our blindness,
 To marvel we cannot see
 Wherefore such things should be,
 Or to question Infinite Kindness
 Of this or of that Decree,

Or to fear lest Nature bungle,
 That in certain ways she errs :
 The cobra in the jungle,
 The crotalus in the sod,
 Evil and good are hers ;—
 Murderers and torturers !
 Ye, too, were made by God.

All slowly heaven is nighing,
 Needs that offence must come ;
 Ever the Old Wrong dying
 Will sting, in the death-coil lying,
 And hiss till its fork be dumb.

But dare deny no further,
 Black-hearted, brazen-cheeked !
 Ye on whose lips yon murder
 These fifty moons hath recked,—

From the wretched scenic dunce,
 Long a-hungered to rouse
 A Nation's heart for the nonce.—
 (Hugging his hell, so that once
 He might yet bring down the house!)—

From the commons, gross and simple,
 Of a blind and bloody land,
 (Long fed on venomous lies!)—
 To the horrid heart and hand
 That sunless murder dyes.—
 The hand that drew the wimple
 Over those cruel eyes.

Pass on,—your deeds are done,
 Forever sets your sun;
 Vainly ye lived or died,
 'Gainst Freedom and the Laws,—
 And your memory and your cause
 Shall haunt o'er the trophied tide

Like some Pirate Caravel floating
 Dreadful, adrift—whose crew
 From her yard-arms dangle rotting,—
 The old Horror of the blue.

Avoid ye.—let the morrow
 Sentence or mercy see.
 Pass to your place: our sorrow
 Is all too dark to borrow
 One shade from such as ye.

But if one, with merciful eyes,
 From the forgiving skies
 Looks, 'mid our gloom, to see
 Yonder where Murder lies,
 Stripped of the woman guise,
 And waiting the doom,—'t is he.

Kindly Spirit!—Ah, when did treason
 Bid such a generous nature cease.
 Mild by temper and strong by reason.
 But ever leaning to love and peace?

A head how sober! a heart how spacious!
 A manner equal with high or low;
 Rough, but gentle; uncouth, but gracious;
 And still inclining to lips of woe.

Patient when saddest, calm when sternest,
 Grieved when rigid for justice' sake;
 Given to jest, yet ever in earnest.
 If aught of right or truth were at stake.

Simple of heart, yet shrewd therewith;
 Slow to resolve, but firm to hold;
 Still with parable and with myth
 Seasoning truth, like Them of old;
 Aptest humor and quaintest pith!
 (Still we smile o'er the tales he told.)

And if, sometimes, in saddest stress,
 That mind, over-meshed by fate,
 (Ringed round with treason and hate,
 And guiding the State by guess,)
 Could doubt and could hesitate,—
 Who, alas! had done less
 In the world's most deadly strait?

But how true to the Common Cause!
 Of his task how unweary!
 How hard he worked, how good he was,
 How kindly and cheery!

How, while it marked redouble
 The howls and hisses and sneers,
 That great heart bore our trouble
 Through all these terrible years,—

And, cooling passion with state,
 And ever counting the cost,
 Kept the Twin World-Robbers in wait
 Till the time for their clutch was lost!

How much he cared for the State,
 How little for praise or pelf!
 A man too simply great
 To scheme for his proper self.

But in mirth that strong heart rested
 From its strife with the false and violent,—
 A jester!—So Henry jested,
 So jested William the Silent.

Orange, shocking the dull
 With careless conceit and quip,
 Yet holding the dumb heart full
 With Holland's life on his lip!*

Navarre, bonhomme and pleasant,
 Pitying the poor man's lot,
 Wishing that every peasant
 A chicken had in his pot;

Feeding the stubborn bourgeois,
 Though Paris still held out;
 Holding the League in awe,
 But jolly with all about.

* "His temperament was cheerful. At table, the pleasures of which in moderation were his only relaxation, he was always animated and merry; and this jocoseness was partly natural, partly intentional. In the darkest hours of his country's trial, he affected a serenity he was far from feeling; so that his apparent gayety at momentous epochs was even censured by dullards, who could not comprehend its philosophy, nor applaud the flippancy of William the Silent. He went through life bearing the load of a people's sorrows with a smiling face."—*Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic.*

Perhaps a lively national sense of humor is one of the surest exponents of advanced civilization. Certainly a grim sullenness and fierceness have been the leading traits of the Rebellion for Slavery; while Freedom, like a Brave at the stake, has gone through her long agony with a smile and a jest ever on her lips.

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Out of an o'erflowed fulness
Those deep hearts seemed too light,—
(And so 't was, murder's dulness
Was set with sullener spite.)

Yet whoso might pierce the guise
Of mirth in the man we mourn
Would mark, and with grieved surprise,
All the great soul had borne,
In the piteous lines, and the kind, sad eyes
So dreadfully wearied and worn.

And we trusted (the last dread page
Once turned of our Doomsday Scroll)
To have seen him, sunny of soul,
In a cheery, grand old age.

But, Father, 't is well with thee!
And since ever, when God draws nigh,
Some grief for the good must be,
'T was well, even so to die,—

'Mid the thunder of Treason's fall,
The yielding of haughty town,
The crashing of cruel wall,
The trembling of tyrant crown!

The ringing of hearth and pavement
To the clash of falling chains,—
The centuries of enslavement
Dead, with their blood-bought gains!

And through trouble weary and long
Well hadst thou seen the way,
Leaving the State so strong
It did not reel for a day;

And even in death couldst give
A token for Freedom's strife,—
A proof how republics live,
And not by a single life,

But the Right Divine of man,
And the many, trained to be free,—
And none, since the world began,
Ever was mourned like thee.

Dost thou feel it, O noble Heart!
(So grieved and so wronged below.)
From the rest wherein thou art?
Do they see it, those patient eyes?
Is there heed in the happy skies
For tokens of world-wide woe?

The Land's great lamentations,
 The mighty mourning of cannon,
 The myriad flags half-mast,—
 The late remorse of the nations,
 Grief from Volga to Shannon!
 (Now they know thee at last.)

How, from gray Niagara's shore
 To Canaveral's surfy shoal,—
 From the rough Atlantic roar
 To the long Pacific roll,—
 For bereavement and for dole,
 Every cottage wears its weed,
 White as thine own pure soul,
 And black as the traitor deed!

How, under a nation's pall,
 The dust so dear in our sight
 To its home on the prairie passed,—
 The leagues of funeral,
 The myriads, morn and night,
 Pressing to look their last!

Nor alone the State's Eclipse;
 But how tears in hard eyes gather,—
 And on rough and bearded lips,
 Of the regiments and the ships,—
 "Oh, our dear Father!"

And methinks of all the million
 That looked on the dark dead face,
 'Neath its sable-plumed pavilion,
 The crone of a humbler race
 Is saddest of all to think on,
 And the old swart lips that said,
 Sobbing, "Abraham Lincoln!
 Oh, he is dead, he is dead!"

Hush! let our heavy souls
 To-day be glad; for agen
 The stormy music swells and rolls
 Stirring the hearts of men.

And under the Nation's Dome,
 They've guarded so well and long,
 Our boys come marching home,
 Two hundred thousand strong.

All in the pleasant month of May,
 With war-worn colors and drums,
 Still, through the livelong summer's day,
 Regiment, regiment comes.

Like the tide, yesty and barmy,
 That sets on a wild lee-shore,
 Surge the ranks of an army
 Never reviewed before!

Who shall look on the like agen,
 Or see such host of the brave?
 A mighty River of marching men
 Rolls the Capital through,—
 Rank on rank, and wave on wave,
 Of bayonet-crested blue!

How the chargers neigh and champ,
 (Their riders weary of camp.)
 With curvet and with caracole!—
 The cavalry comes with thundrous tramp,
 And the cannons heavily roll.

And ever, flowery and gay,
 The Staff sweeps on in a spray
 Of tossing forelocks and manes;
 But each bridle-arm has a weed
 Of funeral, black as the steed
 That fiery Sheridan reins.

Grandest of mortal sights
 The sun-browned ranks to view,—
 The Colors ragged in a hundred fights,
 And the dusty Frocks of Blue!

And all day, mile on mile,
 With cheer, and waving, and smile,
 The war-worn legions defile
 Where the nation's noblest stand;
 And the Great Lieutenant looks on,
 With the Flower of a rescued Land,—
 For the terrible work is done,
 And the Good Fight is won
 For God and for Fatherland.

So, from the fields they win.
 Our men are marching home,
 A million are marching home!
 To the cannon's thundering din,
 And banners on mast and dome,—
 And the ships come sailing in
 With all their ensigns dight,
 As erst for a great sea-fight.

Let every color fly,
 Every pennon flaunt in pride;
 Wave, Starry Flag, on high!

Float in the sunny sky,
Stream o'er the stormy tide!
For every stripe of stainless hue,
And every star in the field of blue,
Ten thousand of the brave and true
Have laid them down and died.

And in all our pride to-day
We think, with a tender pain,
Of those so far away,
They will not come home again.

And our boys had fondly thought,
To-day, in marching by,
From the ground so dearly bought,
And the fields so bravely fought,
To have met their Father's eye.

But they may not see him in place,
Nor their ranks be seen of him;
We look for the well-known face,
And the splendor is strangely dim.

Perished?—who was it said
Our Leader had passed away?
Dead? Our President dead?—
He has not died for a day!

We mourn for a little breath,
Such as, late or soon, dust yields;
But the Dark Flower of Death
Blooms in the fadeless fields.

We looked on a cold, still brow:
But Lincoln could yet survive;
He never was more alive,
Never nearer than now.

For the pleasant season found him,
Guarded by faithful hands,
In the fairest of Summer Lands:
With his own brave Staff around him,
There our President stands.

There they are all at his side,
The noble hearts and true,
That did all men might do,—
Then slept, with their swords, and died.

Of little the storm has reft us
But the brave and kindly clay
(’T is but dust where Lander left us,
And but turf where Lyon lay).

There 's Winthrop, true to the end,
And Ellsworth of long ago,
(First fair young head laid low!)
There 's Baker, the brave old friend,
And Douglas, the friendly foe:

(Baker, that still stood up
When 't was death on either hand:
" 'T is a soldier's part to stoop,
But the Senator must stand.")

The heroes gather and form:—
There 's Cameron, with his scars,
Sedgwick, of siege and storm,
And Mitchell, that joined his stars.

Winthrop, of sword and pen,
Wadsworth, with silver hair,
Mansfield, ruler of men,
And brave McPherson are there.

Birney, who led so long,
Abbott, born to command,
Elliott the bold, and Strong,
Who fell on the hard-fought strand.

Lytle, soldier and bard,
And the Ellets, sire and son,
Ransom, all grandly scarred,
And Redfield, no more on guard,
(But Alatoona is won!)

Reno, of pure desert,
Kearney, with heart of flame,
And Russell, that hid his hurt
Till the final death-bolt came.

Terrill, dead where he fought,
Wallace, that would not yield,
And Sumner, who vainly sought
A grave on the foughthen field

(But died ere the end he saw,
With years and battles outworn).
There 's Harmon of Kenesaw,
And Ulric Dahlgren, and Shaw,
That slept with his Hope Forlorn.

Bayard, that knew not fear,
(True as the knight of yore.)
And Putnam, and Paul Revere,
Worthy the names they bore.

Allen, who died for others,
Bryan, of gentle fame,
And the brave New-England brothers
That have left us Lowell's name.

Home, at last, from the wars, —
Stedman, the staunch and mild,
And Janeway, our hero-child,
Home, with his fifteen scars !

There's Porter, ever in front,
True son of a sea-king sire,
And Christian Foote, and Dupont
(Dupont, who led his ships
Rounding the first Ellipse
Of thunder and of fire).

There's Ward, with his brave death-wounds,
And Cummings, of spotless name,
And Smith, who hurtled his rounds
When deck and hatch were aflame ;

Wainwright, steadfast and true,
Rodgers, of brave sea-blood,
And Craven, with ship and crew
Sunk in the salt sea flood.

And, a little later to part,
Our Captain, noble and dear —
(Did they deem thee, then, austere ?
Drayton ! — O pure and kindly heart !
Thine is the seaman's tear.)

All such, — and many another,
(Ah, list how long to name !)
That stood like brother by brother,
And died on the field of fame.

And around — (for there can cease
This earthly trouble) — they throng,
The friends that had passed in peace,
The foes that have seen their wrong.

(But, a little from the rest,
With sad eyes looking down,
And brows of softened frown,
With stern arms on the chest,
Are two, standing abreast, —
Stonewall and Old John Brown.)

But the stainless and the true,
These by their President stand,
To look on his last review,
Or march with the old command.

And lo, from a thousand fields,
From all the old battle-haunts,
A greater Army than Sherman wilds,
A grander Review than Grant's!

Gathered home from the grave,
Risen from sun and rain, —
Rescued from wind and wave,
Out of the stormy main, —
The Legions of our Brave
Are all in their lines again!

Many a stout Corps that went,
Full-ranked, from camp and tent,
And brought back a brigade;
Many a brave regiment,
That mustered only a squad.

The lost battalions,
That, when the fight went wrong,
Stood and died at their guns, —
The stormers steady and strong,

With their best blood that bought
Scarp, and ravelin, and wall, —
The companies that fought
Till a corporal's guard was all.

Many a valiant crew,
That passed in battle and wreck, —
Ah, so faithful and true!
They died on the bloody deck,
They sank in the soundless blue.

All the loyal and bold
That lay on a soldier's bier, —
The stretchers borne to the rear,
The hammocks lowered to the hold.

The shattered wreck we hurried,
In death-fight, from deck and port. —
The Blacks that Wagner buried,
That died in the Bloody Fort!

Comrades of camp and mess,
Left, as they lay, to die,
In the battle's sorest stress.
When the storm of fight swept by:
They lay in the Wilderness. —
Ah, where did they not lie?

In the tangled swamp they lay,
They lay so still on the sward! —

They rolled in the sick-bay,
Moaning their lives away;—
They flushed in the fevered ward.

They rotted in Libby yonder,
They starved in the foul stockade,—
Hearing afar the thunder
Of the Union cannonade!

But the old wounds all are healed,
And the dungeoned limbs are free,—
The Blue Frocks rise from the field,
The Blue Jackets out of the sea.

They've 'scaped from the torture-den,
They've broken the bloody sod,
They're all come to life agen!—
The Third of a Million men
That died for Thee and for God!

A tenderer green than May
The Eternal Season wears,—
The blue of our summer's day.
Is dim and pallid to theirs,—
The Horror faded away,
And 't was heaven all unawares!

Tents on the Infinite Shore!
Flags in the azuline sky,
Sails on the seas once more!
To-day, in the heaven on high,
All under arms once more!

The troops are all in their lines,
The guidons flutter and play;
But every bayonet shines,
For all must march to-day.

What lofty pennons flaunt?
What mighty echoes haunt,
As of great guns, o'er the main?
Hark to the sound again!
The Congress is all-ataunt!
The Cumberland's manned again!

All the ships and their men
Are in line of battle to-day,—
All at quarters, as when
Their last roll thundered away,—
All at their guns, as then,
For the Fleet salutes to-day.

The armies have broken camp
On the vast and sunny plain,
The drums are rolling again;
With steady, measured tramp,
They're marching all again.

With alignment firm and solemn,
Once again they form
In mighty square and column,—
But never for charge and storm.

The Old Flag they died under
Floats above them on the shore,
And on the great ships yonder
The ensigns dip once more,—
And once again the thunder
Of the thirty guns and four!

In solid platoons of steel,
Under heaven's triumphal arch,
The long lines break and wheel;
And the word is, "Forward, march!"

The colors ripple o'erhead,
The drums roll up to the sky,
And with martial time and tread
The regiments all pass by,—
The ranks of our faithful Dead,
Meeting their President's eye.

With a soldier's quiet pride
They smile o'er the perished pain,
For their anguish was not vain,—
For thee, O Father, we died!
And we did not die in vain.

March on, your last brave mile!
Salute him, Star and Lance,
Form round him, rank and file,
And look on the kind, rough face;
But the quaint and homely smile
Has a glory and a grace
It never had known erewhile,—
Never, in time and space.

Close round him, hearts of pride!
Press near him, side by side,—
Our Father is not alone!
For the Holy Right ye died,
And Christ, the Crucified,
Waits to welcome his own.

REVIEWS AND LITERARY NOTICES.

Letters to Various Persons. By HENRY D. THOREAU. Boston: Ticknor & Fields.

THE prose of Thoreau is daily winning recognition as possessing some of the very highest qualities of thought and utterance, in a degree scarcely rivalled in contemporary literature. In spite of whim and frequent over-refining, and the entire omission of many important aspects of human life, these wondrous merits exercise their charm, and we value everything which lets us into the workshop of so rare a mind. These letters, most of which were addressed to a single confidential friend, give us Thoreau's thoughts in undress, and there has been no previous book in which we came so near him. It is like engraving the studies of an artist, — studies many of which were found too daring or difficult for final execution, and which must be shown in their original shape or not at all. To any one who was more artist than thinker this exhibition would be doing wrong; but to one like Thoreau, more thinker than artist, it is an act of justice.

The public, being always eager for the details of personal life, and therefore especially hungry for private letters, will hardly make this distinction. All is held to be right which gives us more personality in print. One can fancy the exasperation of a gossip, however, on opening these profound and philosophic leaves. There is almost no private history in them; and even of Thoreau's beloved science of Natural History, very little. He does, indeed, begin one letter with "Dear Mother, . . . Pray have you the seventeen-year locust in Concord?" which recalls Mendelssohn's birthday letter to his mother, opening with two bars of music. But even such mundane matters as these occur rarely in the book, which is chiefly made up of pure thought, and that of the highest and often of the most subtle quality.

Thoreau had, in literature as in life, a code of his own, which, if sometimes lax where others were stringent, was always stringent in higher matters, where others were lax. Even the friendship of Emerson could not coerce him into that careful elaboration which gives dignity and sometimes a certain artistic monotony to the works of our

great essayist. Emerson never wilfully leaves a point unguarded, never allows himself to be caught in undress. Thoreau spurns this punctiliousness, and thus impairs his average execution; while for the same reason he attains, in favored moments, a diction more flowing and a more lyric strain than his teacher ever allows himself, at least in prose. He also secures, through this daring, the occasional expression of more delicate as well as more fantastic thoughts. And there is an interesting passage in these letters where he rather unexpectedly recognizes the dignity of literary art as art, and states very finely its range of power. "To look at literature, — how many fine thoughts has every man had! how few fine thoughts are expressed! Yet we never have a fantasy so subtle and ethereal, but that *talent merely*, with more resolution and faithful persistency, after a thousand failures, might fix and engrave it in distinct and enduring words, and we should see that our dreams are the solidest facts that we know." The Italics are his own, and the glimpse at his literary method is very valuable.

One sees also, in these letters, how innate in him was that grand simplicity of spiritual attitude, compared with which most confessions of faith seem to show something hackneyed and second-hand. It seems the first resumption — unless here again we must link his name with Emerson's — of that great strain of thought of which Epictetus the slave and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus the sovereign were the last previous examples. Amid the general *Miserere*, here is one hymn of lofty cheer. There is neither weak conceit nor weak contrition, but gratitude for existence, and a sublime aim. "My actual life," he says, "is a fact in view of which I have no occasion to congratulate myself; but for my faith and aspiration I have respect. It is from these that I speak. Every man's position is, in fact, too simple to be described. . . . I am simply what I am, or I begin to be that. . . . I know that I am. I know that another is who knows more than I, who takes interest in me, whose creature, and yet whose kindred, in one sense, am I. I know that the enterprise is worthy. I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news." (p. 45.)

"Happy the man," he elsewhere nobly

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